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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this survey were: (1) to provide the Oswego campus community with a description of the way in which students use and think about alcohol; (2) to describe an existing base of data which can be used to answer a variety of question about drinking asked by members of the campus community. A questionnaire was utilized to study the attitudes and behaviors of 135 undergraduate students. The questionnaire is reproduced as a part of this document, and could be used elsewhere "as is" or in modified form. The results of this study are intended to provide a broad description of the way in which students use and think about alcohol. There is no attempt to draw any firm conclusions; however the following points emerge: (1) the range of drinking behavior is extremely broad; and (2) half the students do not believe that drinking represents a serious problem for students. Of the half that do see it as a problem, a third do not believe that the college should be involved in the "problem". (Author/JLL)

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ED138849

General Description of Student Attitudes Toward Alcohol and Drinking Behavior

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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November 9, 1976

CG 011311

Nothing seems to create as much confusion or to evoke as much interest on the Oswego campus as the issue of student drinking. Almost everyone has some kind of opinion about the effect of the pattern of alcohol use on the way in which students function in the college environment. Some draw a parallel between heavy drinking and property damage, vandalism or even false fire alarms, others point to the relationhip between drinking in college and the medical and physical problems that affect students including eventual alcoholism. Still others concern themselves with the psychological dependency that may be caused by alcohol and the obstacles that it may place in the way of the personal development of students.

At the same time, proponents of drinking argue that alcohol serves a useful social function because it helps students to relax and escape from their day-to-day academic pressures, they believe that alcohol is a useful social lubricant which makes it possible for thousands of young people, who do not know each other and who come together from a variety of backgrounds, to readily establish social relationship. Some argue that alcohol is the basis of relatively inexpensive entertainment; bands which play in bars cost the students a great deal less than concerts featuring the same performers.

No matter how you look at it, everyone has some sort of opinion about the way in which students use and abuse alcohol on the campus at Oswego. The one thing that all of us share is a profound confusion about reality. We simply do not know who drinks, how much, and how often. We do not know what students think about alcohol and, as a result, no one can do very much except talk about the issue.

The purposes of this study were:

1. to provide the campus community with a description of the way in which students use alcohol and think about it, and

2. to describe an existing base of data which can be used to answer a variety of questions raised about drinking by members of the campus community.

Method

During the spring 1976 semester a questionnaire was developed by the Office of Student Affairs to obtain three types of information. We wanted to know how many students drank, how often they drank, how much they consumed, and where they drank. In addition, we were interested in knowing how they felt about alcohol. We wanted to know whether or not they saw alcohol as a problem for the campus, what kinds of problems they felt might be related to alcohol and the extent to which they, themselves, had experienced serious problems as a consequence of drinking. Finally, we wanted to know something about the respondents. We were interested in knowing whether they were male or female, their year in college, place of residence, their grades, and something about their background.

The resulting survey instrument which was developed contained questions related to each of these areas. The initial instrument was reviewed by several dozen students who suggested a number of changes in the kinds of questions which were asked and the way in which they were asked. A second version of the survey was developed, incorporating these suggestions, and was tested on students in two academic classes. Their additional suggestions along with those made by the professional staff of the Hewitt Union were used to form the final variation of the questionnaire.

During the fall 1976 semester, this questionnaire was sent to 210 students who were registered at the College as full-time undergraduates. One hundred thirty-five useable questionnaires were returned, a rate of return of 64.3%. These were scored and analyzed by means of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), a computer program available on a limited basis through the

facilities of the Computer Center at the State University College at Oswego.

For the purpose of this initial report, the analysis consisted of the calculation of the percentage of respondents who had checked each response item. Means and standard deviations were also available for those items where the data was continuous and it made sense to sum the responses to obtain a mean.

Results

Table 1 is a reproduction of the actual questionnaire which was used to collect the data. In the space provided for the respondent to indicate the answer to each question, the percentage of students responding has been inserted. The only exception to this is in that section of eleven questions which asks students to agree or disagree with statements about the use of alcohol on campus. Since these data are continuous, means and standard deviations appear in the space.

Every survey conducted with a sample of subjects is, itself prone to a well-defined degree of error. The percentage that appears in Table 1 is a perfectly accurate description of the response of the sample but it is only an approximation of the response that would be given by the total population of students.

Table 2 provides the information needed in order to generalize the percent obtained in the sample of 135 students to estimate the percent that actually exists in the total population of undergraduates. To use this table, suppose that one interesting response was selected by 33% of the sample. Table 2 suggests that 19 out of 20 times, the response from the total population would be within 7.7% of that figure and 99 out of 100 times it would be

withinin 10.2% of that figure. In other words, in the population, the true percentage lies between 22.8% and 43.2%, 99 out of 100 times. We can, therefore, be very sure of the range within which the percentage of undergraduate students in general, would lie, if all of them had returned a survey. This table should be used to generalize beyond the findings for this specific sample of Oswego students.

Conclusion

These results are intended to provide a broad description of the way in which students on our campus use and think about alcohol. There was no attempt to draw any firm conclusions; however, several noteworthy facts have emerged.

First, the range of drinking behavior is extremely broad. While most students do drink (only 4.5% indicated that they never consume alcohol), almost as many students drink once a week or less as drink more than twice a week. The same is true about the amount students consume when they do drink. Almost as many students confine their drinking to one, or perhaps two drinks in an evening as drink more than four. Consequently, any attempt to talk about Oswego students as heavy drinkers is dangerous. It is important to distinguish between those students who drink heavily and those who drink in moderation.

The second interesting fact is that half of the students do not believe that drinking represents a serious problem for students at Oswego and of the half that do see it as a problem, one-third do not believe that the College should be involved in what they consider to be a student problem. Only about a quarter of all students are of the opinion that the College ought to be involved in any way and most of them feel that the College role should be restricted to the development of an educational program. Only a very limited

number feel that the College should take the step of controlling alcohol. The results do not suggest that the present policies which regulate alcohol should be abandoned. In fact, most students feel that the current regulations are not restrictive and do not interfere with their rights.

Since the purpose of this report was to discuss attitudes and behaviors rather than to test hypotheses, further analysis is inappropriate. We do hope, however, that this description will generate discussion and curiosity and that this will lead to the development of a number of interesting, useful, and testable hypotheses. All of this data is readily available for further analysis, ranging from simple cross-tabulations to complex multivariate designs. These will be employed in a continuing analysis of the data by the Office of Student Affairs and in response to the questions and suggestions which we hope you will present to us.

We invite your comments about any aspect of this study. We are particularly interested in your suggestions for further analysis and presentations of this data. If the current data is insufficient to answer the questions raised, then we will devise methods of collecting new data in order to help you to understand the role which alcohol plays in the life of students at the State University College at Oswego.

TABLE 1

Survey of Student Drinking

1. Are you	Male		38.5%
	Female		61.5%
			%
2. What is your year in college?		Freshman	24.4
		Sophomore	22.2
		Junior	31.9
		Senior	21.5
3. How old are you?		17	2.2
		18	22.2
		19	23.7
		20	26.7
		21	14.8
		22	5.9
		older than 22	4.4
4. Where do you live?	In a single-sex residence hall		36.3
	In a coed residence hall		44.4
	In a fraternity or sorority house		4.4
	In an off-campus apartment		11.1
	At home with my parents/ guardian		2.2
	Other		1.5
5. How do you describe your home area?		Urban	9.0
		Suburban	48.5
		Small Town	29.9
		Rural	12.7
6. Are you a transfer student?	no		80.0
	Yes, from a two-year college		15.6
	Yes, from a four-year college		4.4
7. What is your current cumulative grade-point-average?			
	Higher than 3.50		8.7
	Between 3.50 and 3.01		28.3
	Between 3.00 and 2.51		40.9
	Between 2.50 and 2.01		18.9
	Less than 2.01		3.1

Please read each of the following statements and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with it by placing a number in the blank following the statement:

5 if you strongly agree
4 if you agree
3 if you are neutral
2 if you disagree
1 if you strongly disagree

		Mean	SD
1.	There is too much pressure on Oswego students to consume alcohol.	2.889	0.990
2.	Alcohol serves a useful function by helping students to communicate with one another.	2.896	1.152
3.	Alcohol serves a useful purpose by helping students to relax and escape from their academic pressures.	3.209	1.144
4.	Social activities would be more enjoyable if students would not drink.	2.358	0.799
5.	Few students would attend a social function if alcohol were not available.	3.612	1.130
6.	The College should provide more activities for non-drinkers.	3.179	0.874
7.	It is important for students to have the opportunity to learn to use alcohol in a manner that will not cause problems.	4.179	0.848
8.	The use of alcohol often leads to damaged property on this campus.	3.675	0.989
9.	The use of alcohol often leads to casual sexual behavior.	3.649	1.013
10.	The policies that currently regulate the use of alcohol on campus are too restrictive, and infringe on the rights of students.	2.500	0.994
11.	Alcohol often interferes with learning and educational goals of students.	3.165	1.016

Drinking Behavior

			%
1.	How often, on the average, do you drink?	Never	4.5
		Less than once a week	22.4
		About once a week	20.1
		About twice a week	28.4
		About three times a week	14.9
		Almost every day	9.7

2. Do you drink more frequently than you did in high school		%
	Yes	58.2
	No	41.8
3. Do either or both of your parents use alcohol?		
	Yes	79.9
	No	20.1
4. How many of your friends drink?	Almost none	3.0
	About 1/4	3.0
	About 1/2	2.2
	About 3/4	17.2
	Almost all of them	74.6
5. Do you believe that drinking is a serious problem for students at Oswego?	No	51.1
	Yes, and the College should control the use of alcohol	6.1
	Yes, the College should provide an educational program	21.4
	Yes, but it is a student problem and the College should not be involved.	21.4

If you have anything else you think it is important for us to know, please skip to the end of the instrument and tell us. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

If you do not use alcohol, you have finished the survey. Please accept our thanks. If you do drink, there are more questions to go.

6. On the average, when you drink how many glasses of wine or beer or how many shots of whiskey do you drink in an evening?	1	2.4
	2	18.7
	3	20.3
	4	20.3
	More than 4	29.3
	I really don't know	8.9
7. How often do you drink in each of the following places?		
a. in your dorm room or apartment	frequently	17.7
	occasionally	61.3
	never	21.0
b. at College-sponsored social functions	frequently	13.8
	occasionally	66.7
	never	19.5
c. in local bars or taverns	frequently	33.9
	occasionally	57.3
	never	33.9

Table 1, cont'd.

		%
d. in the College Tavern	frequently	12.9
	occasionally	76.6
	never	10.5
e. at parties and social events that are not officially sponsored by the College	frequently	44.4
	occasionally	50.0
	never	5.6
f. when you are home for a holiday or vacation	frequently	26.6
	occasionally	66.1
	never	7.3
8. Have you ever had a serious problem (eg. traffic accident, property destroyed, illness; academic difficulty) as a consequence of drinking?	No	91.1
	Yes	8.9
9. How much do you estimate you spend for alcohol in a typical week	less than $2.00	50.0
	$2.00 - $4.99	30.6
	$5.00 - $7.99	9.7
	$8.00 - $10.99	8.9
	more than $11.00	0.8

TABLE 2

Confidence Intervals Around Percentages
in a Sample of 135 Subjects

If the percentage is approximately	then the true percentage lies within the following range	
	19 of 20 times	99 of 100 times
99	±1.7%	± 2.2%
97	±2.9%	± 3.8%
95	±3.7%	± 4.8%
90	±5.1%	± 6.6%
80	±6.7%	± 8.9%
70	±7.7%	±10.2%
60	±8.3%	±10.9%
50	±8.4%	±11.1%
40	±8.3%	±10.9%
30	±7.7%	±10.2%
20	±6.7%	± 8.9%
10	±5.1%	± 6.6%
5	±3.7%	± 4.8%
3	±2.9%	± 3.8%
1	±1.7%	± 2.2%